
NEWS From:

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Clement, Honda Unveil Bill to Usher in a New Era in Rail Transit Policy

Transportation Committee Members Unveil Measure to Allow Public Transit Greater Access to Railways

Washington, D.C.— Railroad Subcommittee Ranking Member Rep. Bob Clement (D-TN) and Transportation Committee Member Mike Honda (D-San Jose) today called for a new era in transit and passenger rail policy, introducing legislation that would revolutionize the way cities, counties, and regions work with freight railroads to provide passenger rail service for their communities. The bill, known as the “*Transit Rail Accommodation Improvement and Needs Act for the 21st Century*” or “TRAIN 21” would give local transit authorities the option to take disputes over passenger track access and rights-of-way to the federal Department of Transportation’s Surface Transportation Board (STB). Under existing law local transit authorities do not have the ability to appeal to the federal government if freight railroad companies refuse to negotiate railway access in a fair and timely manner.

William W. Millar, President of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) was on hand to support Clement and Honda as they introduced TRAIN 21 during a Capitol Hill press conference today.

“APTA strongly supports TRAIN 21, which would provide public agencies a federal process to help resolve disputes involving use of freight rights-of-way. This is not a handout,” Millar said. **“We want to pay for passenger rail access, and we will bring improved infrastructure to freight rail systems. TRAIN 21 simply establishes a process to give us a seat at the table.”**

“In order to address passenger rail needs, many communities are seeking the shared use of existing tracks, but have run into problems obtaining workable agreements for the shared use of existing tracks,” Clement said. **“Cities such as Santa Clara, California, Albany, New York, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Kansas City, Missouri and my own hometown of Nashville, Tennessee, as well as other cities across the nation are facing these same problems and having a difficult time working out their differences with the railroads. This legislation will encourage freight railroads to carefully examine what is in the best interest of the community and public good, not just the ‘bottom line.’”**

“It is time for the federal government to take a strong stand for the millions of Americans who commute to work each day by rail— and the millions of Americans who cannot use our railways because our public transit systems do not have sufficient access to needed resources” said Honda. **“Increased public transit on our railways is an essential part of the long-term solution to easing overcrowding on our highways and railways in the South Bay— our bill is an important step towards building a national transportation system for the 21st century that is safer, more efficient and more reliable than ever before.”**

The legislation establishes the STB as the arbiter of disputes between the mass transportation authority and the freight railroad when the parties can’t agree to compensation for access or operating conditions. The STB currently serves as arbiter for disputes between Amtrak and the freight railroads and this legislation would build on this thirty-year history to provide the same option for mass transportation authorities. Where the rail transit project would operate in the freight railroad right-of-way, the STB would have to make a finding that the freight railroad service would not be significantly impaired and that the transit authority would have to pay just compensation for the right-of-way.